

Paul Arnold Wittenberg, DVM

2/21/1940-4/20/2020



On Monday, April 20, 2020, Dr. Paul A. Wittenberg, loving husband, father, grandfather, brother, and friend, passed away in Hot Springs, SD at the age of 80 after a long and courageous battle with cancer.

He is survived by many family members who will miss him, including his wife, Kathleen Wittenberg (Hot Springs, SD); his brother, Peter Wittenberg (Gastonia, NC), and sister-in-law Betty Ann; his son, Greg Wittenberg (Rapid City, SD), daughter-in-law, Nan, and grandchildren, Sophie, Grace, and Vanessa; his daughter, Debbie Drew (Minneapolis, MN), son-in-law, Darren, and grandchildren, Alex and Zach; and daughter, Kim Wittenberg (Rockville, MD); as well as stepdaughter, Kerri Goethals (Rapid City, SD), her husband, Brian, and their children, Jaxon and Nathan; and stepson, Justin Berard (Manitoba, Canada), and his children, Dominique and Patrick. Paul was preceded in death by his first wife, Frances (Cross).

The funeral services at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Hot Springs will be scheduled and announced after the COVID-19 pandemic is under control. There will be a graveside memorial service (family-only due to pandemic restrictions) at Fairview Cemetery in Oral, SD on Monday, April 27, 2020 at 10:00am. Memorial donations may be made to the Pioneer Museum (PO Box 361, Hot Springs, SD, 57747) in Paul's name. Arrangements have been placed in the care of McColley's Chapel of the Hills in Hot Springs, and written condolences can be made at www.mccolleyschapels.com.

Paul lived an interesting and full life. He was born in Tokyo, Japan to Drs. Ernst and Elizabeth (Shevchenko) Wittenberg on February 21, 1940, just 2 days shy of his older brother, Peter's, second birthday. Paul's father was born in Hamburg, Germany and was a physician, first practicing as a naval ship doctor, and then moving to Japan, where he served the employees of several embassies, including the US and British embassies. Paul's mother was born in Harbin, China of a Ukrainian Don Cossack family, and attained her dental degree in Germany. She moved to Japan to practice dentistry, and met and married Ernst in 1937.

Paul was a strong man, always pushing forward despite any odds, even as a child. His family's plan to board a ship on December 7, 1941 to move to England was halted by the attack on Pearl Harbor that same day, and his family was put under house arrest for the duration of the World War II. Their food was severely rationed, and Paul ended up contracting rickets from malnutrition. This never stopped Paul from being athletic and strong. After the war ended, Paul's aunt, Rosie Nettle, sponsored the family to come to America. In October of 1946, Paul and his family boarded the Marine Falcon (a battleship that had been converted to a refugee ship) and crossed the rough seas from Japan to Seattle, WA. Upon landing, they boarded a train to New York City, as Paul's Aunt lived in Long Island. Paul lived in NY for about 1 year before the family moved to CO, since CO was one of the few states that would accept foreign doctors. The family lived in Colorado Springs, CO while Paul's father completed an Ob-Gyn

residency and took the CO State Medical Boards, and then they moved to La Jara, CO in 1948, when Paul's father joined a medical practice there. In 1952, Paul and his family attained their US citizenship – a proud moment for him.

Paul attended grade school in La Jara, CO, and then high school at Holy Cross Abbey in Canyon City, CO. While growing up, Paul worked at cow camps and sheep camps in the mountains of CO and WY. They were the best of both worlds for him, since he was able to be in nature and get experience with animals. Paul rode a horse 40 miles or more into the camps. Two summers, he also worked extracting honey. Paul was never afraid of hard work.

In 1958, Paul graduated from high school and began pre-veterinary studies at Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins, CO; in 1960, he was accepted to the CSU Veterinary Medical Program; and in 1964, he graduated with his veterinary degree. He practiced in Idaho for 2 years before moving to Hot Springs, SD in August of 1966 and starting the town's first veterinary practice – the Fall River Veterinary Clinic. Paul took great lengths to be there when folks needed medical care for their animals... on holidays, during blizzards, and in the dark of night. He serviced Fall River, Shannon, and Custer Counties, as well as Wind Cave National Park and Custer State Park. No distance was too far; Paul averaged 40,000 miles of driving on calls every year during the 39 years that he owned the Veterinary Clinic, which means Paul drove the equivalent of the distance around the world nearly 66 times during the height of his career.

Paul was the veterinarian for the bison herds, elk, and Big Horn sheep in the Black Hills. He worked the Bison Round Up every year, and also helped trap Big Horn sheep in Canada to introduce them into the Custer State Park sheep population and strengthen the genetic pool. Paul's expertise and strong leadership skills resulted in several awards and appointments throughout his over 50 year-long career: in the 1970's, Paul was appointed by Governor Richard Francis Kneip to be the President of the SD Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners; in 1989, Paul was elected by South Dakota Veterinary Medical Association (SDVMA) membership to be the SDVMA President; in 1996, Paul was selected by the SDVMA Executive Board to receive the SD Veterinarian of the Year Award for outstanding service to the veterinary field; and in 2004-2005, Paul served as the Animal Health Coordinator and Trainer for the SD Animal Industry Board and as a Member of the SD Reserve Veterinary Medical Officer's Corps. Paul took his responsibilities seriously and tried to make a difference. While serving on the SD Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners, for example, the law in SD at that time mandated that only American citizens could practice veterinary medicine in SD. Knowing first-hand how difficult it was for his father to practice medicine when he first moved to America, Paul worked on changing this law so that foreign veterinarians could practice.

In 2005, Paul sold his veterinary practice and worked for the Department of Homeland Security in the State Veterinary Science Department in Pierre, SD, where he trained SD veterinarians about foreign animal diseases and bioterrorism. Paul retired back in the Hot Springs area, working as a relief veterinarian and consultant. Paul published scientific journal articles during his career, and one on buffalo fertility drew the attention of several bison ranchers across America, including Ted Turner (CNN Founder) and Joe Ricketts (Chicago Cubs Owner), who hired Paul as an expert consultant to help with their buffalo herds.

Paul was tough. His veterinary work was physically demanding, and throughout his career he was injured by several of his patients, being kicked and even occasionally pinned by horses, cattle, and bison. Paul's work led to knee replacements and spine surgeries, but nothing stopped him from continuing to work at the career he loved.

While not performing veterinary work, Paul always dedicated much of his free time to do volunteer work in Hot Springs. One example was when he heard that the 6th grade basketball program was in

jeopardy of ending and immediately volunteered to be the boys' and girls' 6th grade basketball coach; Paul ended up coaching for 10 years! Paul also served as a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club (including as the Rotary Club president), and was the town's cartoonist for over 50 years.

Paul had unusual luck, or maybe a vigilant Guardian Angel, and narrowly escaped death more than once in his lifetime. The first time was in Japan on August 15, 1945, when Paul and his family, as foreign prisoners of war, were to be executed by the Japanese, but the execution order was halted because Japanese Emperor Hirohito signed the peace treaty. Another time was much later in life, when Paul was scheduled to fly with his daughter, Debbie, to Japan to check something out for the Fall River Feedlot, but they didn't make the flight because things didn't get scheduled as planned. That was in their favor, as the plane they had planned to board crashed in Japan, and all passengers were killed. A third instance was when Paul visited Cancun with Kathleen, and he got caught in a riptide that pulled him out to sea. He only managed to survive because of his sharp swimming skills and ocean knowledge.

Paul was brave and adventurous. He didn't hesitate to backpack through Europe in college, snorkel the Great Barrier Reef while reef sharks nibbled on his foot that he had cut on coral, take a helicopter ride to survey mountain sheep, or take a class from Homeland Security to learn how to recognize bombs so he didn't get blown up. Paul even went on a fishing trip in the Arctic in 2011 with Joe Ricketts. Paul flew in with Joe and his crew on a boat plane and taught the crew fly fishing. Paul's favorite parts of the trip were eating gourmet meals, having the best Scotch he'd ever tasted, and seeing the Northern stars.

He loved the outdoors since he was a child. After Paul and his family moved to La Jara, CO, Paul would often hike into and camp in the mountains surrounding the San Luis Valley – the world's largest and highest alpine valley surrounded by the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east and the San Juan Mountains to the west. Paul later shared his love for the outdoors with his children, friends, and wife by taking them camping in the WY mountains every chance he could get. Paul was an expert at fly fishing and taught many of his friends and even school children in Rapid City. He also loved hunting season and took great pride in his hunting dogs, who helped him get many pheasants, ducks, and geese over the years.

Paul was a gifted athlete and always found joy in playing and watching sports. During high school, Paul was on the football team as a linebacker and enjoyed playing basketball as well. After each basketball game, Paul would stay to dance at the sock hops, where the students danced in their socks to the tunes of a Hi-Fi record player set up in the basketball court. (Paul's dancing skills and joy of dancing later inspired his daughter, Kim, to learn swing dancing.) Paul even took his turn at bronco-riding, although this only lasted a few seconds before he was bucked off and lost consciousness. Paul also boxed and performed in weightlifting competitions in high school. In 1958, Paul's senior year, he won the local weightlifting championship. After Paul settled in Hot Springs in 1966, he often played tennis at the local courts, teaching others his expert techniques. (Paul eventually used his tennis skills to whop his kids and grandkids at ping-pong at home.) Paul also loved swimming and water-skiing at Angostura, and skiing down the most difficult runs at Terry Peak, which he often did with his son, Greg, and Kim.

Paul shared his passions with others – taking countless friends and family hunting, fishing, and camping; teaching Greg, Kim, and his grandson, Zach, how to shoot hoops; taking all three of his children with him on veterinary calls, especially his daughter, Debbie; taking Debbie and Kim antique shopping; and bringing all kinds of injured animals (such as cottontails, squirrels, deer, and an owl) home to his children, where they learned how to nurture them back to health.

Paul had many other talents in addition to sports, outdoorsman-ship, and veterinary medicine. He had an eye for wildlife and nature photography and artistry. A painting of one of his photos of his hunting dog, Sam, retrieving a duck, was featured on the cover of Ducks Unlimited. He also designed the scenes engraved on many of the SDVMA commemorative belt buckles.

Paul grew up speaking multiple languages – his first language was Japanese, his second, German, and his third, English. (Paul often joked that English not being his first language was why his handwriting was hard to read.) After WWII ended and the US occupation in Japan began, American soldiers at Karuizawa and the R&R Camp often asked Paul, although only 5 years old, to help them translate Japanese. Paul gave the soldiers tours of the area on his bicycle, and afterward they often invited him to dinner at the PX – a big treat for Paul.

Paul also was a self-taught paleontologist and archaeologist. His expertise was called upon by many throughout his life to date fossils and examine Native American artifacts. Paul served on the board of the Mammoth Site for decades, and he donated much of his fossil, rock, and artifact collection to both the Mammoth Site and the Pioneer Museum. One of Paul's prized finds was a 9,000 year-old spear head that he found on his property while out feeding his horse.

Paul had several quirky talents as well. Although Paul was left handed (and often joked that God made a few perfect people, and the rest he made right handed), Paul could write with both hands, not only forwards, but also upside down and backwards. He could also ride a bike while sitting on the handlebars.

Paul's sense of humor and creativity was one of a kind, and led him not only to being a cartoonist from the young age of 11, but also in pulling countless practical jokes on his teachers, friends, and family. On a family trip to Yellowstone, while hiking in an area that had had recent Grizzly sightings, Paul hid behind the camper and so convincingly growled like a Grizzly that Greg and Kim ran as fast as they've ever run – all the way into a lake. During Paul's veterinary career, innumerable pranks were pulled by him on clients (and by clients as well, whenever they saw an opportunity). One memorable prank was on a local rancher, Dane Conger – while examining Dane's cow, he pretended to extract a large beetle from inside the cow. Paul had actually picked up the beetle from the floor when Dane wasn't looking. Paul told Dane a detailed story about how "rare" the beetle was and explained that, if a cow happens to swallow the beetle's egg, it hatches in the cow's stomach and, in the larval stage, it crawls out and then back in again into the womb. Dane carried this "rare" beetle around in a bottle of formalin for weeks, telling everyone in town the story, until Paul finally told him it was actually an April Fools' hoax. Paul was still a jokester and inspired laughter even when he was very sick with cancer. One time, when a nurse asked him, "How are you feeling, Paul?" Paul looked up with a smile and replied, "With my fingers."

Most of all, Paul appreciated his friends and family and was there for them. Paul looked forward to playing poker with his friends (and taking their nickels whenever he could). He cherished even the smallest gestures; after moving to America, Paul's first Christmas gift was a whistle from his aunt; he kept this whistle his entire life. Paul enjoyed truly getting to know people. One of the things Paul loved about being a veterinarian was that veterinarians have the opportunity to really get to know their clients. He made many close friendships with clients over the years. Paul enjoyed hunting and fishing with his friends and helping them work their dogs. He also liked to entertain company, sharing a good Balvenie single malt scotch and cooking the fruits of his hunting and fishing, grilling steaks the size of Texas, flipping apple pancakes, and making special hamburgers stuffed with seasoned bread crumbs, evaporated milk, eggs, and onions. Paul taught his children generosity by example – he jumped to pick up the check for meals, even when he didn't know everyone at the table; he cared for sick animals even when he knew clients couldn't pay; and he was unfailingly there to lend a helping hand before anyone asked him.

Paul had an impact from the very beginning and touched the lives of many. He is safely in God's arms now.